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THE POST-SCHOOLING TRANSITIONS OF REMOTE INDIGENOUS SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATES: A SYSTEMATIC SCOPING REVIEW OF SUPPORT STRATEGIES

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Abstract

School completion has been hailed by many as the ‘holy grail’ of Indigenous education, and 42% remote-living Indigenous students now attain year 12 completion each year. But for a range of complex reasons, only 60% of these graduates translate this achievement into further engagement in study, training or employment. This systematic literature review examined the evidence for strategies that support the post-schooling transitions of these students. Adhering to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, it examined the scope and quality of the existing evidence and applied qualitative meta-synthesis to elucidate the conditions that enable or hinder, and strategies that support post-schooling transitions. Findings suggested that lower rates of post-schooling study or employment uptake are influenced by: historical misalignment of education approaches with community values and aspirations; limited opportunities in remote communities; and other socio-economic factors. Strategies were found to be most effective when cross-sectoral education/employment and community partnerships were formed, and remote communities were integral in the planning and implementation process. Strategies to improve transitions included: embedding Indigenous and Western knowledge systems in education, task-based learning, explicitly addressing students’ language needs, providing immersion experiences such as in universities, and mentoring programs to widen students’ aspirations. However, the evidence-base remains weak and further research is needed to understand the impact of strategies on students’ aspirations and their immediate and long-term post-schooling transitions.

Keywords: remote; Indigenous; transition; post-secondary; pathways; aspiration

Introduction

The transition from secondary education to post-schooling pathways is a critical life stage which ultimately signals a move towards greater independence and active social and economic participation in society. For any young person this transition process can be challenging. However, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (hereafter respectfully termed Indigenous) secondary school graduates who come from remote communities, as defined by their relative access to services (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), navigating this transition process can entail additional layers of complexity. Distance to services and other socio-economic, cultural and aspirational factors contribute to generally non-linear and fragmented study and employment pathways for these graduates (Abbott-Chapman, 2011). These factors include the historical exclusion of Indigenous people from the Australian economy, restricted labour markets, and limited access to further study and training options in remote communities which pose logistical challenges for those wishing to study or work at, or away from, home. Difficulties in negotiating this transition juncture to secure meaningful options beyond school, can place graduates “*at risk of falling through the cracks*” (Walsh & De Campo, 2010, p. 31), with potential economic, social and health implications (Carson, Dunbar, Chenhall & Bailie, 2007). To mitigate this risk there is a need to ensure that adequate preparation and support is provided to remote-living Indigenous young people, which is both responsive to their unique remote contexts, and provides them with the skills and resources necessary to negotiate these post-schooling transitions in meaningful ways. The education sector (at all levels) has a critical role to play in this area, however there are implications for policy makers and a wide range of sectors to work cohesively to ensure that the systems and resources in place are conducive to meeting community aspirations and needs.

Background

Year 12 completion has been hailed by many as the ‘holy grail’ of Indigenous education (Stewart, 2015); however, the translation of this attainment into further study, training and employment outcomes has been problematic for remote-living Indigenous students. Thus, while a recent Closing the Gap report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017) indicates steady improvements in year 12 attainment for remote students (24.1% in 2008 to 41.7% in 2015), employment outcomes remain acutely concerning. Findings based on the 2016 Census revealed that 40% of remote Indigenous year 12 completers were not in any form of employment, education or training (NEET). Furthermore, for those in vocational education and training (VET), completion rates remain low (Guenther, Bat, Stephens, Skewes, Boughton & Williamson, 2017). Nevertheless, the Census found those that did finish year 12 were twice as likely to be in some form of education or employment as those who left school before year 12 (Venn, 2016). While there are promising correlations between year 12 attainment and the uptake of study or employment pathways, the NEET levels are still unacceptably low. This highlights that year 12 attainment alone does not necessarily equate with employment but is only one amongst a multitude of complex factors that contribute to transitions from secondary education to post-schooling pathways for remote-living Indigenous school leavers.

Amongst these factors, accessibility to education and employment opportunities can significantly influence or delimit young people’s trajectories. Limited to no provision of secondary or tertiary education in many remote Indigenous communities means that young people are often required to move to regional centres to attend boarding schools or gain further tertiary qualifications. Relocation requires the cultural and social capital and financial and logistical support that may or may not be readily available. Efforts to address issues of access have seen an increase in transition support services for those attending boarding schools (such as those in Queensland and the Northern Territory) and increased scholarship opportunities. While positive in many

ways, this focus has implications for the resourcing of community-based secondary schools which are vital for students who do not wish to attend school away from their home communities (Osborne, Guenther, King, Lester, Ken & Lester, 2017). At a tertiary level, institutions have increased on-line course delivery and established programs such as the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) which delivers a combination of on-line and block-training. Such programs appear to achieve some degree of success however, there is still much to be done to improve transition pathways. In-community employment options can also be problematic. While restricted labour markets result in fewer and less varied employment opportunities, some suggest that the issue is not lack of jobs but rather who occupies them (Guenther, 2015; Mundine, 2018). Many professional jobs (such as those in health and education) are held by ‘outsiders’ who hold tertiary or formal qualifications that are not readily gained in remote communities. Further arguments suggest that many cultural activities undertaken by locals such as hunting, traditional healers and cultural crafts are not valued in the ‘real job’ market despite their contribution to the local economy and to cultural sustainability (Altman, 2009; Guenther, 2015).

Successive Australian governments have long prioritised the improvement of educational and employment outcomes for remote-living Indigenous young people. Since the 1980s and 1990s these efforts have been increasingly influenced by a global movement of neoliberal rationality. Neoliberalism is a complex economic, political and cultural ideology, based on the principle of free markets with limited government regulation. It promotes privatisation and encourages profit motive to stimulate and drive market competition (Dodge, 2016). While an in-depth analysis of the complexities of neoliberalism within the remote Indigenous community context is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note the influence it has had on education and employment. This further raises the question; to what extent does neoliberalism influence the post-schooling transition of Indigenous youth living in remote communities, and how does it align with the values and assumptions about education and employment as defined by remote Indigenous residents? This question is particularly imperative as these communities are often characterised by a lack of a market economy, limited economic opportunities, small sized settlements with large distances between them, a lack of human and institutional capital and high level of mobility. Notwithstanding the need to build local capacity, the neoliberal assumption that improvement in quantifiable education outcomes will lead to improved post-schooling employment and economic participation is often not manifested; instead there is an over-reliance on non-Indigenous employees to staff the public service-dominated economies (Moran, 2008).

Despite significant research in the broad fields of Indigenous education and youth transitions (Harrevald, Singh & Li, 2013; Mander, 2012; Sarra, 2011; Venn, 2018) there has been little documentation of the conditions and strategies that support the post-schooling transitions of remote-living Indigenous students. However, over the past decade, a small body of work addressing this distinct demographic has been emerging. Perhaps the most comprehensive work to date is a recent review of the literature by Cuervo, Barakat, and Turnbull (2015) that scoped the resources, barriers and motivations that facilitate or hinder the transitions of (particularly east Arnhem Land) remote-living Indigenous students. They found that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach and the ethnocentric nature of Australia’s education systems were significant barriers to post-schooling transitions. Furthermore, the authors found that “*the isolation of remote communities and their inability to access services only exacerbates entrenched disadvantage*” (p. 9). Culturally responsive policies (see Castagno & Brayboy, 2008), community consultations, and culturally relevant curricula aided in facilitating transitions.

This current literature review was initiated in response to concerns raised by remote Cape York community members as part of a resilience research study (McCalman et al., 2016) about the lack of support available for the post-schooling transition of their youth once they completed boarding school education. In searching for evidence about what supports were available, we identified that no published systematic literature review of strategies to support the post-schooling transitions of remote-living Indigenous students existed. This systematic scoping review thus examined literature that specifically focused on the aspirations of Indigenous students from remote communities and their transitions from school into post-schooling study, training, employment, or other pathways.

Methods

This systematic literature review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, & The PRISMA Group, 2009). Initially we developed a review protocol that outlined two objectives for the review: 1) to determine the scope and quality of the available evidence; and 2) to elicit themes in relation to the conditions and strategies that promote and support post-schooling transitions into study, training or employment. Database searches were then conducted according to the PRISMA framework. We then utilised meta-synthesis to examine the post-schooling transition experiences of remote-living Indigenous students. Here we followed Noblit and Hare's (1988) seven-step process for conducting a meta synthesis: 1) getting started; 2) deciding what is relevant to the initial interest; 3) reading the publications; 4) determining how the studies are related; 5) translating the studies into one another; 6) synthesising translations; and 7) expressing the synthesis to elucidate the conditions that enable or hinder post-schooling transitions and the strategies designed to address these conditions in terms of their impact.

Eligibility Criteria

To be included in the review, publications had to: (a) be Australian; (b) have as the target population remote-living Indigenous students; (c) examine the transition between secondary school and further study, training or employment; (d) describe or evaluate strategies aimed at supporting post-school transitions; (e) be published between 2001 and March 2018 – to coincide with the seminal MCEETYA taskforce report on Indigenous Education (2001); and (f) be published in English. Both peer-reviewed and grey literature were included. The rationale for focusing only on Australian studies was that, while international studies could provide useful evidence of support strategies, it was important to identify the strategies that address the unique historical, political and cultural circumstances of remote-living Indigenous Australians.

Search Terms

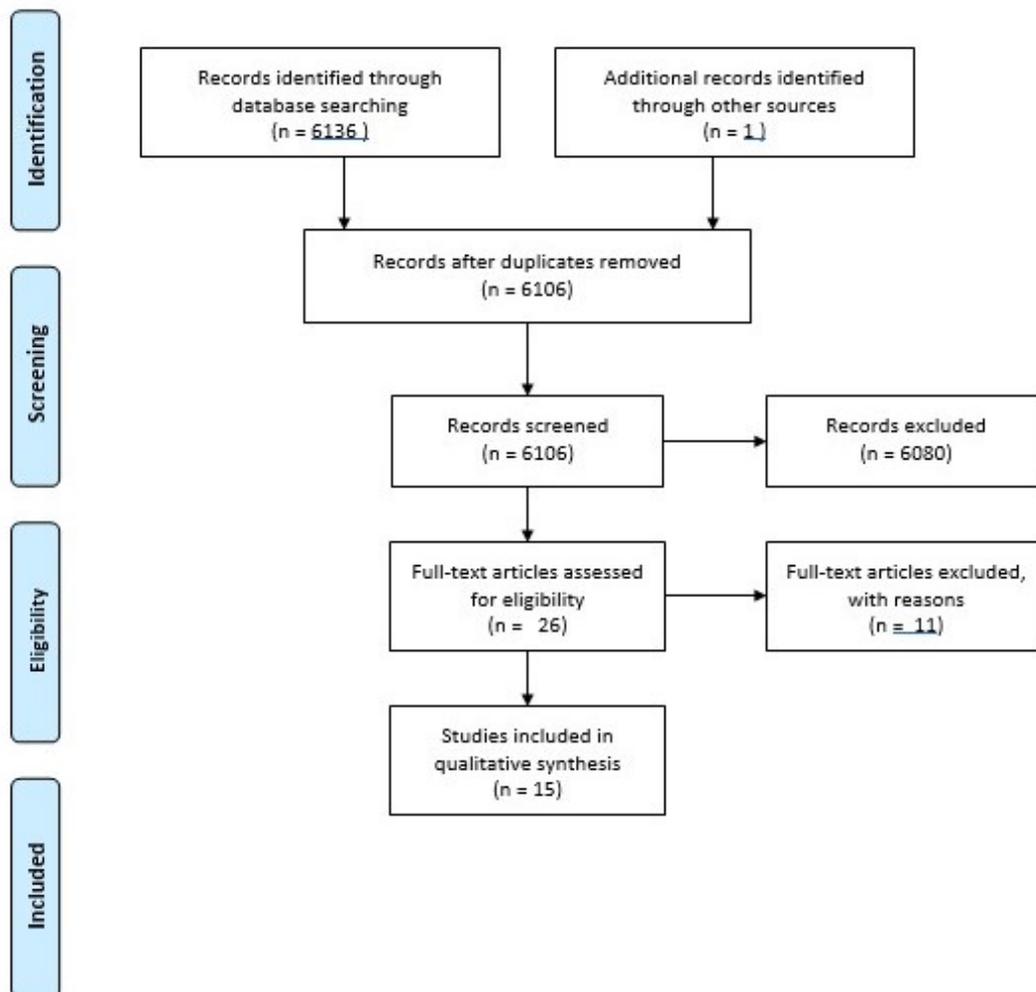
Search terms were chosen to elucidate the target populations, strategies, comparisons and outcomes (PICO). Combinations of these key terms were then developed to form search strings which were applied to search each of the following electronic databases: Informit Indigenous Collection; Informit A+ Education; Education Research Complete; VOCed Plus; ERIC; and Google Scholar. The first search examined the databases utilising broad terms related to post-schooling transitions. The second search refined the search string to include studies about aspirations and pathway programs.

Search 1: remote AND Indigenous OR Aboriginal, AND post-school* transition*, OR post-school pathway* **Search 1 = 2631 publications**

Search 2: remote AND Indigenous OR Aboriginal, AND post-school* transition*, AND aspirations OR pathway AND program* **Search 2 = 3505 publications**

Search Strategy

A cursory search of databases revealed a plethora of literature regarding strategies and programs that target the broad topics of Indigenous post-schooling transitions, Indigenous education, and youth transitions. However, when filtered for studies that specifically focused on the distinct needs of remote Indigenous students and their post-schooling transitions, the evidence-base was substantially reduced. Using the search strategies outlined above, 6136 publications were identified. One additional study was identified through other sources. Thirty-one duplicates were removed, leaving 6106 publications. Titles and abstracts were then screened using the inclusion and exclusion criteria to eliminate publications that did not meet the criteria. This resulted in the exclusion of 6080 publications. The 26 remaining publications were read in full and a further 11 were eliminated, leaving 15 publications that met the full criteria for the literature review (Figure 1).



From: Moher et al., (2009).

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Chart

Results

Of the 15 publications that met the inclusion criteria, there were: 9 peer-reviewed journal articles, 2 reports, 2 working papers by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), and 2 book chapters. The earliest studies were published in 2010 (Kral, 2010; Altman & Fogarty, 2010). Of the 15 publications, 9 reported intervention studies, 3 were case studies and 3 discussed strategies more broadly. The publication by Smith, Trinidad, and Larkin (2015) reported six case studies of Higher Education Participation and Partnership Programs (HEPPP); of these, only case studies 1: Whole of Community Engagement Initiative, and 2: Old Ways New Ways, were included.

Of the literature reviewed, seven publications focused on Northern Territory, two on Western Australia, two on South Australia, two on Western Australia and Northern Territory combined, one on Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia combined, and one was Queensland focused.

The literature comprised three distinct institutional categories: six publications primarily examined university led aspiration and/or outreach programs targeting secondary school students (Godinho, Wooley, Webb, & Winkel, 2015; Peralta, Cinelli, & Bennie, 2018; Shinkfield, 2014; Smith et al., 2015; Thomas, Bronwyn, Kirkham, & Parry, 2014; Thorn & Flodin, 2015); two publications focused on vocational education and training (VET) programs based at secondary schools (Oliver, Grote, Roschecouste, & Exell, 2013; Pham, Page, Sivamalai, & Woolley, 2012); and four related to experiential place-based learning programs with a local employment focus (Altman & Fogarty, 2010; Fogarty, 2012; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; Kral, 2010). Ten publications reported studies conducted with students enrolled in community-based schools (Altman & Fogarty, 2010; Burton & Osborne, 2014; Fogarty, 2012; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; Godinho et al., 2015; Kral, 2010; Peralta et al., 2018; Osborne et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2014), and four publications reported studies conducted with remote Indigenous students who attended boarding schools (Oliver et al., 2013; Pham et al., 2012; Shinkfield, 2014; Thorn & Flodin, 2015).

Table 1 outlines: 1) the conditions that influenced student transitions into post-schooling pathways; 2) the strategies designed to support post-schooling transitions; and 3) the reported outcomes of the strategies. Outcomes were further divided into two sub-categories: primary outcomes and secondary outcomes. Primary outcomes were those considered to directly reflected the aims; for example, a primary outcome of an aspiration strategy was increased interest in taking up a university pathway. Secondary outcomes were those that were unintended consequences of the strategies such as an improved attitude at school.

Table 1: Characteristics of Post-Schooling Strategies

Publications	Conditions			Strategies						Outcomes								
										Primary Outcomes				Secondary Outcomes				
First author and date	Cultural and social	Economic and geographic	Policy and institutional	Community-driven approaches	Indigenous and Western knowledges	Immersion programs	Task-based learning or VET programs	Mentoring programs	ICT training	ESLD support or scaffolded learning	Transmission of Indigenous language and knowledge	Raised aspirations	Increased sense of belonging	Increased career content knowledge	Qualifications	Exposure to positive role-modelling	Increased student self-esteem / confidence	School engagement
Altman 2010	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	X	X	X	-	X	X
Kral 2010	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	√	-	√	-	X	√	X	√	X	-
Pham 2012	√	X	√	X	X	√	√	X	X	√	X	√	X	√	-	-	√	√
Fogarty 2012	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	X	X	√	√	X	√	X	√	X	√
Fogarty & Schwab 2012	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	X	X	√	-	X	-	-	√	X	-
Oliver 2013	√	X	√	√	X	-	√	-	X	√	X	-	-	-	-	X	X	X
Burton 2014	√	X	√	√	√	X	X	-	X	X	√	-	X	X	X	-	X	X
Thomas 2014	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	X	X	√	√	√
Shinkfield 2014	√	X	√	x	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	-	-
Godinho 2015	√	X	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	X	√	X	X	√	√	X
Smith 2015 – CS 1 *	√	-	√	√	√	X	X	√	X	X	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
CS 2*	√	√	√	-	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	X	-	X	√	X	X
Thorn 2015	√	X	X	X	X	√	√	√	X	√	X	√	√	X	√	√	√	X
Guenther 2017	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Osborne 2017	√	√	X	√	√	-	√	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Peralta 2018	√	X	X	√	-	X	X	√	X	X	X	-	X	X	X	√	√	√

* Smith 2015 – CS1 Whole Community Initiative
 CS2 Old Ways New Ways

√ explicit
 x Not included
 - implicit

Conditions that Influence Post-Schooling Transitions

Conditions were defined as environments that either facilitated or constrained students’ transitions to post-schooling study, training or employment. We applied a social ecological perspective to the definition of conditions, acknowledging that post-schooling transition experiences are influenced and impacted at multiple levels by individual, family, community, culture, geographical, economic, institutional and policy factors.

Social and Cultural Conditions

A recurrent theme of included studies was the perceived purpose of education and how this relates to the social and cultural values, beliefs and contexts of remote Indigenous students. In her research exploring non-formal models of learning in remote Northern Territory communities, Kral (2010) emphasised the incongruencies between mainstream perspectives and the “social, cultural and economic reality of remote community life” (p. 5). She stated that the “typical mainstream youth transition from school to employment does not match the reality of community life, where traditional cultural schemas underpin the practices of everyday life and the construction of social identity.” (p. i). Burton and Osborne (2014) reiterated this observation when writing about Anangu (Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara) schools and communities. They stated that a

fundamental error of mainstream Australian society, is that it “tends to assume that the purposes of schooling and aspirations that school should enable are universal and roundly accepted” (p. 33). They argued that education must be considered from an Indigenous standpoint and underwritten by Indigenous values; failure to do so is a reason for the poor engagement of Indigenous students with, and limited improvement in, education and employment outcomes (Altman & Fogarty, 2010; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; Guenther, Disbray, Benveniste, & Osborne, 2017; Kral, 2010).

Based on studies conducted in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia, Guenther, Disbray et al. (2017) found that contrary to mainstream perspectives, remote Indigenous people did not perceive preparation for employment or economic participation to be the primary purpose of education. Rather, it was ranked fourth in importance behind: language, land and culture, identity, and being ‘strong in both worlds’. Guenther, Disbray et al. (2017) emphasised that this did not mean that young people in remote communities do not have aspirations. Rather their aspirations were aligned with those things that were meaningful to them. Eight publications identified the importance of preserving and valuing traditional languages, as meaningful elements, both through education and community-based employment pathways (Altman & Fogarty, 2010; Fogarty, 2012; Guenther, Disbray, et al., 2017; Kral, 2010; Oliver et al., 2013; Osbourne et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2014). Elaborating on this point, Altman and Fogarty (2010) highlighted that contemporary Indigenous “ways of being are modern and intercultural rather than pre-colonial” (p. 115), but support for the revival, maintenance, and transference of traditional beliefs, value systems, knowledges and practices can occur through educational practices and employment pathways.

While the desire to preserve Indigenous languages was viewed as important, several publications reported the challenges associated with accessing a mainstream curriculum for students who speak Standard Australian English (SAE) as a second or subsequent language or dialect. They pointed out that low SAE literacy levels can impact student progression and completion of courses and thus act as a barrier to accessing and engaging in tertiary education and employment opportunities (Oliver et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2014). They concurred that supporting students’ language needs requires constant consideration.

Consistent with Indigenous community members’ perceptions of the purpose for education, the concept of being ‘strong in both worlds’ was another theme raised in the literature. Undeniably, remote Indigenous youth are “increasingly connected to mainstream practices, technology and a non-traditional lifestyle” (Kral, 2010, p. 10). Studies highlighted the importance of student capacity to exercise choice and self-agency to utilise opportunities that link students both to their cultural values as well as the skills to navigate a spectrum of pathways. For example, Burton and Osborne (2014) state that in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands:

there is an immense challenge, but critical need for there to be a cultural reinvention of sorts, where we (Anangu) retain “our power” (Minutjukur, 2012) and identity in the education process, but also pursue the “powerful weapon” (Mandela, 2003) of “whitestream” (Haraway, 2004) education (p. 41).

Fogarty (2012); and Fogarty and Schwab (2012) examined Learning through Country programs, finding that Indigenous people expressed a “desire for the intergenerational transfer of Indigenous knowledge and for the teaching of Western land management skills and scientific

learning” (Fogarty, 2012, p. 90). Fogarty (2012) referred to this dual acquisition of knowledges as a two-way or two toolbox approach. Similarly, Altman and Fogarty (2010) proposed a hybrid economy model that offers a means to both preserve cultural ways, while also participating in state and market sectors. They stated that “*Aboriginal people need to have the option to live in two worlds, but also between them*” (p. 124). From a different perspective, being strong in two worlds also involved broadening experiences and raising the aspirations and awareness of tertiary and other pathways beyond remote communities (Thomas et al., 2014).

Parents, family and community role models were also considered to have a strong influence on students’ educational engagement and post-schooling aspirations. Guenther, Disbray, et al. (2017) pointed to evidence which “*supports the view that parents and family members are the primary source of aspiration*” (Minutjukur & Osborne 2014 as cited in Guenther, Disbray, et al., 2017, p. 260). Examples were given in several studies of their critical role in influencing education completion and modelling behaviours that built confidence in unfamiliar social contexts (Burton & Osborne, 2014; Guenther, Disbray, et al., 2017; Osborne et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2015). In their study of school to university transitions, Smith et al. (2015) suggested that “*one of the most important factors driving intention to attend university are the expectations of parents and peers*” (p. 18). In addition, Guenther, Disbray, et al. (2017) noted that community members “*see that aspiration for university cannot be ‘taught’; rather, it has to be modelled from a young age*” (p. 266). They suggested that this could be promoted by parents teaching in the community schools, and working in services such as health centres, churches and ranger programs.

Economic and Geographic Conditions

Remote Indigenous community economies have distinct characteristics that set them apart from mainstream Western economies. The historical economic exclusion of remote Indigenous communities from the Australian market economy have generally led to socio-economic marginality, high levels of unemployment and restricted labour markets (Altman & Fogarty, 2010; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012). This coupled with the geographic distance to larger service centres influences student aspirations and post-schooling transitions. Smith et al. (2015) noted that the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (2008) found that Indigenous populations, those from low socio-economic backgrounds and those that live in remote locations experience the greatest levels of disadvantage in terms of education and employment outcomes. This holds particular significance for remote-living Indigenous students, who generally fit into all three demographic categories. There are varying views on how education and post-schooling support should prepare and support students with these economic and geographic conditions in mind. Based on her research in the Northern Territory, Kral (2010) argued that “*many young people do not foresee themselves leaving their communities to seek employment*” (p. 12). She emphasised that building the capacity of students was necessary to enable them to gain employment and take up opportunities within their communities. Osborne et al. (2017) also emphasised the need for training and work for students at a community level but further suggested the need for students “*to develop confidence to engage Western social and academic spaces*” (p.27). On this point, Smith et al. (2015, p. 20) noted that for remote students “*often the possibilities of university have seldom been explored or even presented as an option*”. However, the desire to pursue opportunities beyond remote communities was evident. Thomas et al. (2014) pointed to commentaries by Pearson (2010) that stated that “*some members of a community, while still regarding their community as home, may leave and travel in orbits around that gravitational centre, as they gain other skills which may be useful to their community when they return*” (as cited in Thomas et al., 2014, p. 31). Thomas et al. (2014) noted, however, that moving away from remote communities and having the cultural and social capital to engage beyond the community can be

challenging as “remote communities offer students limited opportunity to make connections with employers, community groups, or to develop the skills needed to navigate the challenges they face in larger communities” (p. 25).

Policy and Institutional Conditions

A resounding discourse of disadvantage pervades public and policy discussions concerning the education and employment outcomes of Indigenous students living in remote communities. Fogarty and Schwab (2012) noted that, the “constants in Indigenous education over the last 50 years have been poor attendance, low retention rates, and literacy and numeracy outcomes well below those of other groups within Australian society” (p. 7). Current policy shifts to fix the “problem” hypothesise that improvement in education outcomes will lead to increased economic participation. This approach has led to a strong focus on measures such as the government’s Closing the Gap education and employment targets, National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and other standardised tests which have become the dominant drivers and measures of what is considered successful education.

Underpinning neoliberal rationality and the dominant assumption that education will lead to increased post-schooling outcomes has also led to policy shifts towards increasing support for boarding school education for remote-living Indigenous students. Guenther, Disbray et al. (2017) noted that the 2015 Northern Territory Indigenous Education Strategy for example, “indicates that focusing on boarding in urban and regional locations, rather than in remote secondary schooling, will be the driving focus in the coming years.” They cautioned however that a lack of rigorous evidence exists regarding the impact of boarding school education on students. Furthermore, Osborne et al. (2017) raised concerns about the potential impact this will have on small remote communities, forcing local schools to close and leaving no options for those that do not suit the boarding school model. Despite limited evidence it is evident that large proportions of students are not retained by their boarding schools (Guenther, Disbray et al. 2017). These concerns are echoed in both The Power of Education review (2017) and The Study Away review (2017). Osborne et al. (2017) did report that there were some positive community expectations about what a boarding school education could offer. Guenther, Disbray et al. (2017) also conceded, that some students have moved seamlessly from secondary education to higher education via a boarding pathway and highlighted the need for research regarding their experiences.

Current policy has been criticised for applying a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach or suggesting simple solutions to complex issues (Fogarty & Schwab., 2012; Kral., 2010; and Guenther, Disbray, et al., 2017). Altman and Fogarty (2010) criticised the policy decisions in the education sector as becoming “more monolithic and monopolistic” and “becoming less sympathetic to diversity and difference” (p.109). They suggested that this limits communities’ abilities to drive local solutions. For example, Fogarty and Schwab (2012) pointed to the difficulty of obtaining funding for alternative schooling models which incorporate community-based initiatives such as blending education with the Indigenous Land and Sea (ILAS) Learning through Country programs.

Strategies Utilised to Support Post-Schooling Transitions

The strategies found in the literature pertained to the three broad sectors: universities, vocational education and training, and employment. Strategies were those initiatives that sought to increase awareness of opportunities and prepare and support students for their post-schooling transition. Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, and Kelly (2012, p. xi) describe these processes as “unlocking capacity and empowering choice”.

Community-Driven Strategies

Twelve of the 15 publications considered community-driven approaches to be an essential component of designing and implementing post-schooling study and employment aspiration and transition programs. Smith et al. (2015) exemplified how Whole of Community Engagement initiatives to strengthen pathways into higher education were “built on and responsive to, Indigenous knowledge and community needs” (p. 20). They noted that partnerships with community members, the establishment of steering committees and participatory action research methods were useful for promoting the adoption of culturally appropriate pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning in tertiary education. Community and student consultations were also foundational building blocks of programs cited by Thomas et al., 2014; Oliver et al., 2013. For example, in developing the Unicamp program (Thomas et al., 2014), forums were held to ascertain community needs, values and aspirations, including what community members saw as being the important aspects of education and what the university could do to assist students to meet their goals. The community, local school and university worked together to develop, evaluate and refine university immersion camps. Likewise, in developing their second language needs analysis model, Oliver et al. (2013) described an intensive interview process with community members and students to determine the language barriers that students experienced in the vocational education sector and sought suggestions on how these barriers could be addressed.

Integrating Indigenous and Western Knowledges

Ten publications described combining Indigenous and Western knowledges to engage students and promote post-schooling options. The Learning through Country (Fogarty & Schwab, 2012) and the Old Ways, New Ways (Smith et al., 2015) programs highlighted such options to build student aspirations in the field of science. Fogarty and Schwab (2012) described how the Maningrida secondary school in the Northern Territory incorporated its Learning through Country program into its senior science program. The formal recognition of this program in the curriculum verified its value within the school program and assisted in enabling students to qualify for university. Local elders and rangers were an integral part of this program and reported the opportunity it provided, particularly for the “transmission of language and knowledge on country” (p. 16). In another study, Kral (2010) suggested the combination of Indigenous and Western knowledge was a way to engage students and promote viable community-based employment solutions. Her study focused on non-formal community-based learning centres to engage students who had disengaged with formal models of education. Through various projects, students combined new skills and knowledge about multi-media, technology and business with various aspects of local arts, language and history to enhance their skills for employment. For example, through the local Indigenous Knowledge Centre, young people learned computer and technology skills to enable them to record and preserve local languages and history. These examples suggested that students were more engaged when they could see that the purpose and meaning of an activity was connected to their own knowledge system.

Mentoring and Role Modelling to Promote Aspirations

Mentoring and role modelling was a prominent strategy for raising students' aspirations. This approach was particularly utilised by universities to promote awareness of potential pathways for secondary school students. For example, the 'Into Uni' project outlined by Shinkfield (2014), a joint initiative by Charles Darwin University and Kormilda College, utilised mentoring as one of its three core strategies. The program invited students to on-campus and on-Country activities, enabling them to connect with Indigenous elders studying at the university and prominent Indigenous mentors and role models through special talks and lectures. Another element of their mentoring program included engaging former Kormilda College alumni students, now studying at the university, to mentor the secondary students. While they noted that many of these mentors were non-Indigenous, they ensured that cross-cultural awareness training was provided. A further exemplar of mentoring was outlined in the sports-based mentoring program outlined by Peralta et al. (2018). They emphasised the need for culturally appropriate mentoring approaches and applied group mentoring as opposed to the traditional one-on-one approach.

Task-based Learning While at School

Eleven publications described task-based teaching and/or learning within VET programs in secondary schools and informal learning centres. This strategy aimed to improve school engagement, particularly with students who were struggling to access the mainstream curriculum, and to facilitate opportunities for post-schooling pathways (Kral, 2010; Oliver et al., 2013). Oliver et al. (2013) suggested that VET based programs have "positive effects on the retention of Indigenous students, providing important pathways into further education and the workforce" (p. 229). They noted that task-based teaching and learning is effective in second language and literacy teaching for Indigenous students who struggle with the literacy and numeracy demands of VET courses. Furthermore, Oliver et al. (2013) and Pham et al. (2012) suggested that gaining qualifications during the secondary school phase of learning was beneficial to pursuing post-schooling pathways in various fields of study. For example, Pham et al. (2012) described the benefits of a tailor-made primary health-care program. They suggested that

a successful Indigenous model of health, including the importance of primary health care, community ownership and a culturally appropriate workforce, can be achieved by increasing Indigenous students' access to health-care qualifications and by raising their awareness and aspiration to career pathways in health (p. 113).

However, Guenther, Disbray, et al. (2017) argued that VET courses were failing to assist transitions in remote communities. They cautioned that attrition rates were high, and that VET was not working to assist remote Indigenous people to gain employment.

Immersion in University Environments

Three publications examined student immersion experiences to demystify the tertiary environment and experience. These programs placed secondary school students into unfamiliar contexts such as a university campus in a well-supported and strategic way. Thorn and Flodin (2015) recognised "that for a person to choose to pursue a higher education pathway, they must believe that they can achieve that goal as well as feel like they will be able to connect to the tertiary environment on a social level" (p. 66). Their study examined the Row AHEAD program by Curtin University, a 12-week rowing and self-development program. It was designed "to create an environment or vehicle through which those students, traditionally not represented at university, can begin finding an internal locus of meaningful belonging within a tertiary institution" (p. 66).

Similarly, Thomas et al. (2014) examined an initiative by the University of South Australia in partnership with Mimili Anangu School to run annual university immersion camps. The aim of the program was to expose students to learning pathways that can lead to a range of careers either within their community or at educational institutions such as university. They also aspired to develop independent living skills, refine communication skills and promote interaction with non-Anangu people.

Supporting Students' Language Needs

Two publications endorsed the provision of scaffolded support to meet the language needs of students who speak SAE as a second or subsequent language to improve the accessibility of post-schooling pathways. The most comprehensive study by Oliver et al. (2013) informed the development of a task-based 'Second Language Needs Analysis Model' designed to identify and support the language and literacy needs of Indigenous VET students, such as oral communication, reading and writing, and building confidence in using SAE in the workplace. Based on interviews with students, community members and teachers, the researchers identified a range of needs-based strategies to support VET students to become more competent and confident in using SAE in training and the work-place. Thomas et al. (2014) also stressed the importance of utilising bilingual community educators to support students and staff during Unicamps.

Outcomes of Strategies

Primary Outcomes

Six publications noted an increased awareness of career pathways and desire by students to pursue a university course or a career related to the program they completed. Pham et al. (2012) reported improved knowledge of health and the acquisition of a certificate qualification in Indigenous primary health care after students completed a VET course as part of their secondary school curriculum. Thorn and Flodin (2015) stated that "*participants were able to feel a sense of belonging in an environment to which they contributed, alongside graduates and university students*" (p. 65). Eight publications reported exposure to positive role-modelling as a benefit. Seven publications reported the transmission of Indigenous languages and knowledges. No study described actual enrolments, further study completed, or employment undertaken as a result of the strategies.

Secondary Outcomes

Secondary outcomes were those additional benefits achieved through participation in the evaluated program. Five publications reported an increase in students' self-esteem and self-confidence after participation in their respective programs. Oliver et al. (2013), Shinkfield, (2014) and Thorn and Flodin (2015) noted that students became more comfortable in interacting with unknown people and grew more comfortable with unfamiliar environments such as the university campus and regional city. Thorn and Flodin (2015) also noted that participants showed an increased pride in their Indigenous identity, culture and spirituality, and teachers reported a "*positive shift in students towards engaging in school and activities, specifically being active participants in the class and demonstrating an increased willingness to learn*" (p. 69).

Discussion

This review found that there is limited publicly available research pertaining to strategies that support remote-living Indigenous students' in their post-schooling transitions. Furthermore, the absence of longitudinal studies confirmed that research in this area is at a formative stage. The literature mainly reported descriptive studies in relation to the conditions that enabled or constrained post-schooling transitions and while strategies were outlined, there was a dearth of rigorous evaluations of their impact. These findings highlight the need for further research and evaluation to build a repertoire of strategies shown to be effective in preparing and supporting students to transition from secondary school into a diverse range of pathways.

Of the three broad sectors (universities, vocational education and training, and employment), the highest number of publications focused on university aspirational programs. Since the national Bradley review (2008) and subsequent Behrendt review (2012), universities have prioritised increasing participation and completion rates of disadvantaged groups, including remote-living Indigenous Australians. The Bradley Review (2008) reported the major barriers to participation in universities as “*educational attainment, lower awareness of the long-term benefits of higher education, less aspiration to participate and the potential need for extra financial, academic or personal support once enrolled*” (as cited in Naylor, Baik, & James, 2013, p. 13). Initiatives such as the federally funded Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) have “*provided an important resource for universities and has led to a wide range of significant initiatives across the nation*” (Naylor et al., 2013, p. 6). Aspirational and immersion programs are a significant feature of strategies employed by universities to target Indigenous people. In contrast, there were fewer VET sector and employment studies.

There are missing perspectives in the current literature. Government and research have driven much of the evidence and there is a need for Indigenous voices, particularly those of the students who are at the centre of the post-schooling transition, to be fore fronted. Studies focused predominantly on the geographical regions of the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia; other remote regions are missing. Fogarty and Schwab (2012) remind us that remote Indigenous communities have “*a diversity of lifestyle and geographic locations, differing histories of engagement with non-Indigenous Australia and a wide spectrum of aspirations for economic and community development*” (p. 7). There is the possibility that this review may have missed such relevant studies, but every effort was made to undertake a rigorous and thorough systematic search, and this seems unlikely. Further research is therefore needed to fill these gaps.

This review has highlighted that the values, needs and aspirations of remote-living Indigenous students are influenced by their unique contexts. They generally navigate their transitions pathways at the interface between Western and Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies (Nakata, 2007) and it is this convergence that is central to much of the complexity in remote Indigenous education and transition contexts. The literature suggested that, much of the failure of mainstream education systems to support successful transitions has stemmed from the assumption that the purpose of education and post-school trajectories for remote-living Indigenous students reflects that of mainstream Australia (Kral, 2010). However, the literature suggested that for remote-living Indigenous people, education was first seen as a tool to build capacity for the maintenance of language, land and culture and identity (Guenther, Disbray, et al., 2017) and education and employment trajectories were often fragmented and non-linear (Abbott-Chapman, 2011). One can't assume this represents the views or trajectories of all remote-

living Indigenous students, however it is essential to keep this in mind when designing and implementing post-schooling transition support programs.

Two divergent ideological approaches that aim to address the disparity in remote Indigenous training and employment outcomes were described in the literature regarding the role of education in preparing for students for their post-schooling transitions. The first reflects the current national neoliberal policy direction based on the premise that improvement in education outcomes will lead to improved post-schooling employment and economic participation. This has promoted more prescriptive curricula, pedagogy and standardised testing which is heavily outcomes-focused. On the one hand, there is an imperative to improve educational outcomes of remote Indigenous students, and to some degree, there have been improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes and year 12 attainment (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017). However, critics of this approach have warned that the model is flawed, suggesting it does not reflect the values of remote Indigenous communities and as such it risks further alienating and disengaging those students who cannot see how this education relates to their world outside of school. Conversely, the alternative ideological approach outlined in five of the publications (Altman & Fogarty, 2010; Fogarty, 2012; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012; Guenther, Disbray, et al., 2017; Kral, 2010), advocates for a more localised and experiential community-based model of learning linked to local employment opportunities. The preservation of cultural knowledge and languages is emphasised in this approach although, it still promotes the need for formal education in what is termed a 'blended approach'. With this model caution is needed to ensure that there is not an imposed assumption that all students desire to pursue in-community post-schooling pathways. Rather there is a need to ensure that any education provided is comprehensive and does not delimit students options to pursue a wide range of post-schooling opportunities, including university or other non-community-based pathways. Regardless of ideological approach, there was consensus in the literature that families and community members desire that their students be 'strong in both worlds'.

Clearly, navigating the post-school transition for remote Indigenous students is complex. The range of strategies outlined in this literature review included community-driven approaches, linking Indigenous and Western knowledges, aspiration and immersion programs, mentoring, experiential and task-based learning, and supporting students' language needs. Each of these strategies had theoretical links to the conditions outlined in this review and most studies reported some degree of success. However, lack of rigorous evaluations meant that the true impact of many of these programs is still unclear. While there is a need to expand research in this field, Biesta (2007) challenges the notion of 'best practice' and argues, that in complex settings such as education, it is questionable whether strategies can be transferred from one context to another. Rather strategies can inform approaches in other settings but must be tailored to the conditions and needs of each unique context.

Conclusion

Navigating the transition from school to study, training, employment, or other aspirational pathways poses unique challenges for remote-living Indigenous students. These transitions are complex. This paper reviewed strategies to support the post-schooling transitions of remote-living Indigenous youth. It emphasised the incongruences between Indigenous and mainstream education perspectives, trajectories and approaches and thus highlighted the importance of preparing and supporting students to navigate their transitions in ways that acknowledge and respond to their unique social, cultural, economic and geographic circumstances. There is paucity

of studies regarding what is effective in supporting post-schooling transitions, and particularly a lack of rigorous evaluations to determine the impacts of strategies. Rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach however, studies included in this review suggest that preparing and supporting students requires multi-faceted strategies that incorporate a mixture of structured and informal approaches, driven by community needs and aspirations. The literature suggests that educational institutions, employment services and other stakeholders must work closely with families and communities to ensure that initiatives align with community aspirations. Collaboration between stakeholders is then required to ensure adequate preparation and support is available to provide young people with the skills and resources necessary to negotiate this post-schooling transition regardless of the post-schooling choices that they decide to follow.

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